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- Talking Points: Libyan-Belgian Nuclear Cooperation

During April, Libya and Belgium discussed for the first time since mid-1983 an expansion of their nuclear cooperation including: training of scientific and technical personnel, design, construction, and operation of nuclear reactors, nuclear fuel services, and safety. A draft protocol is the centerpiece of the discussions.

- The section of the protocol dealing with nuclear fuel cycle services does not necessarily obligate Belgium to provide Libya with nuclear fuel cycle technology, i.e., the facilities for producing uranium tetrafluoride, uranium hexafluoride, and nuclear reactor fuel. Libya will clearly press for technology in these areas, however, because of its long-term desire to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

Background:

- The Libyan nuclear research center at Tajura was supplied by the Soviet Union, but the Libyans have encountered many problems in dealing with the Soviets.
- The Soviet Union has agreed to supply Libya with two 440-megawatt nuclear power reactors but a final agreement has not been reached.
- As a result of their dissatisfaction with Soviet technology, Libya has approached--in addition to Belgium--West Germany, Brazil and India for technologies that would contribute to a capacity to acquire weapons-grade material. In light of these proliferation implications, Libya has been unable to conclude any significant agreements.

Past Libyan Dealings with Belgium

- In 1981, the Belgian firm Belgonucleaire, discussed with Libya the supply of a facility for producing uranium hexafluoride (UF6)--the feed material used in an uranium enrichment plant.
- Subsequently, Belgonucleaire convinced Libya to accept only an uranium tetrafluoride (UF4) production facility.
- In April 1983, Libya informed Belgonucleaire that a continuing commercial relationship depended on Belgium's agreement to supply the UF6 facility.

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- In response to strong US pressure, the Belgian government refused to grant permission for selling UF6 technology to Libya as long as no other supplier agreed to a sale. Libya subsequently halted all of its dealings with Belgonucleaire.

#### Current Status and Outlook

- Libyan officials inadvertently leaked information about their discussions with the Belgians in mid-May. The resulting publicity has caused the Belgian government to delay final approval. This has angered the Libyans.
- Libya now is threatening to tie all future commercial cooperation with Belgium to the draft protocol.
- The Belgians may not make a decision before mid-July when Western supplier states hold a special conference in Luxembourg to discuss nuclear export issues. The Belgians will come under strong pressure from Britain, and several other Western nuclear supplier states, not to sign the agreement or to provide any major nuclear technology or training to Libya because of Qadhafi's long-term nuclear ambitions.
- Brussels has said it will not participate in any Western attempt to embargo all nuclear assistance to Libya, in part because the latter is a signatory to the NPT.

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